

Education Governance Responses
St. Albans Meeting (4/5/07) - St. Albans Town Education Center

21 Attendees (facilitated by Robin Scheu)

Question #1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education governance system in your community?:

Advantages

Local control
Board connection to community
Understands needs of school as they relate to the needs of the community
School is the center of the community – invites input and support
Administration and board close to parents
Coordination of curriculum, purchases & major repairs
Sharing of support staff in Sup. Union
Perception of high quality
Perception of local control
Voices can be heard – voters feel their ideas are being considered
Small geographical footprint – transportation & more class choice
Direct interaction with principal
Payroll business management
Strong staff, board, parent communication
Small schools equally represented
Our school is a good size
Local ownership of school – accountability to our taxpayers, ownership of outcomes
Collaboration with other town boards
Competition

Disadvantages

Local control ---
No common understanding of “governance”, educational mandates
Incompatible skill sets and expectations/different “resources”, conflicting interests
Poor performing boards creating unrealistic expectations
Too many meetings
Special interests of board members
“Silo” mentality of school boards
Disconnect with older students (tuition)
Administrative heavy – too many
Inability to negotiate as large group (purchases & negotiations)
Duplication of services in some areas
Loss of communication – too many paths
Lack of consistent instructional coordination even in same Supv. Union (in high school obvious)
Shortage of Administrators – revolving door
Not enough people to fill school board slots
Not able to share building administrators
Lack of resources for equal educational opportunities
Difficulty integrating place based, volunteer run, service learning activities into the curriculum
Rural vs. urban

Neglect of individual school needs
Cost of negotiations, red tape, prep/meetings
Central Office inefficiencies, duplication of services and resources
Superintendent burn-out
Can't easily replicate what's going well in one school to the next

Question #2: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?

Advantages

Enough superintendents to go around
Less confusion to taxpayer
Sharing resources
Forces curriculum alignment
Regional/unified teacher/administrative negotiations & contracts
Keep the present Supervisory geography (same towns)
More streamlined process & people
Financial & negotiations advantage for smaller towns
Easier finding school board members
Possible better curriculum & instructional coordination/implementation (best practices)
Help "little guys" with resources
Fewer meetings for Super & C.O. staff
Creative thinking/collaboration
Combines resources = expanded opportunities
Time efficiencies
Economic efficiencies down the road – (how long is that road?)
Principals can focus on schools; superintendents could focus on boards (policy governance)
Role clarity

Disadvantages

Complete & total annihilation of small school communities
Disconnect with voters
Does tax burden shift to other communities?
How would membership be decided?
Loss of individual school's culture
Will it save taxpayers dollars?
Forces curriculum alignment
Too powerful school board
Consolidation of power
Pooling of rural & urban interests
Does the achievement data in other states support this model?
Bus/transportation
Vote weighing confusion & possible problem
Loss of local control
Money for teachers' contracts in small towns
Less accountability
Mixing of communities & philosophies
How does each board member represent his/her municipality?
All information would have to come through superintendent

Geographic limitations
Board less connected with the school
Board members with different motivations
Additional pressure for the “I” board member
One superintendent, one board – so how’s this working out in Essex Town, Milton, & Colchester?
Proportional representation works when communities are of similar size

Debrief Comments:

Have we explored intermediary steps - designs? Something not quite so drastic? E.g. finding efficiencies by region (like the E.S.A.’s)
How about regionalizing Special Education resources, but serving students locally?
Superintendents should have the authority to control rogue board members.
State-wide teachers’ contract
Attorneys for superintendents licensing issue – not just professional teachers’ licensing changes
Teachers shouldn’t have the right to strike
Will it save money?
How will budgets/taxes change?
How will superintendent be able to stay in touch w/each school?
How would union high school board be weighted?
Look at 3 tiers: Local – curriculum
 Regional – Special Ed & business functions
 State – Negotiations (salary & benefits)
Merging of public transportation & school student transportation
Looking at common sense boundaries for transportation
Is consolidating school districts a precursor to closing schools & consolidating municipalities?
We need to communicate the real cost drivers of school budgets if it is not governance
Do we need to “fix” the governance structure, or do we just need to fix the tax burden?
Question re: future of union high schools – they would become the district high school
What would happen to high school choice? Possibly state-wide public school choice.
Choice just at high school level or all levels?
Who would approve budgets under a choice model?
One budget for the whole district?
Appreciation for Commissioner’s presence.